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## Audio Describing the TV series *The West Wing* Towards a Coherent Practice

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### Abstract & Keywords

#### English:

The exercise of audio describing *The West Wing* offers excellent opportunities to reflect on the accessibility of TV drama series. This genre has great popular acceptance, financial success, and though it belongs to the much maligned popular TV media, has conquered art and film critics as a quality multimedia production. This success has not been matched with the minimum accessibility requirements. *The West Wing* to mention one -but we could list recent hits such as *The Office*, *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, or *Lost*- is not accessible to the visually impaired. A new horizon opens with NETFLIX new accessibility policy with 100% subtitling and starting to offer audio description in the two new series: *Daredevil* and *Grace and Frankie*. TV series have suffered the same fate throughout academia with little research interest, and particularly in Audiovisual Translation: only four studies (Bucaria 2007, Fuentes Luque 1997/8, Herbst 1994, Zhao 2002) have been found to deal with TV series in the free access Bibliography of Translation Studies BITRA[1]. This article was part of a brilliant publication idea by Christopher Taylor. Based on the same audiovisual input -- the Christmas special episode *In Excelsis Deo* from *The West Wing* (1999) -- many audiovisual methodologies were studied. This contribution focuses on the audio description of TV series in general, and with examples mainly from the abovementioned *The West Wing* episode. It looks at issues such as: continuity, location, time, characters, emotions, sound, AD function and strategies. [2]

**Keywords:** audio description, narrative, characters, location, collocation

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### 1. Accessibility of TV Drama Series

TV drama series is nowadays associated with quality production and financial performance. TV series share shelves in video clubs alongside art house movies. Gifted scriptwriters, directors and actors are now proud of taking part of a genre which was until recently considered as only light entertainment (Monaco 1977:557). Series which have become a commercial success, as is the case of *The Sopranos*, enjoy a high recognition amongst critics, and have won numerous awards. Some films have been the departing point for TV series, such as *M\*A\*S\*H* (Altman 1970), *The Godfather* (Coppola 1972) or *Goodfellas* (Scorsese 1990) and vice versa, as is the case for *Dr Who* with two films *Dr Who and the Daleks* (Flemyng 1965) and the sequel *Daleks' Invasion Earth: 2150 A.D.* (Flemyng 1966). This new quality status for TV productions has led to a profitable system of distribution, with the possibility of watching episodes through IPTV (broadband), TV (broadcast) or DVD. International success has also meant a direct impact on media accessibility i.e. language accessibility, if we consider that subtitling is a palliative technique that allows those who have no access to media for language reasons. A good example is that from the TV series *Lost* (2004-2010), where the final episode was broadcast simultaneously in US and Spain. There was a thirty minute delay in the signal for Spain, to allow for the creation of subtitles. Subtitles translated into Spanish were broadcast live with a considerable time delay, often with omissions. There was an instant complaint on social networks and subtitles received coverage in the national press, where quality issues were the subject of considerable criticism[3]. Interestingly, a new set of subtitles were produced and used for subsequent broadcasts of the programme.

The production of access services to media content is far from being straight forward. Issues are related to the quality in the many translation approaches: dubbing, subtitling, voice-over or accessibility: real live subtitles by respeaking or audio description (AD). Time is also an important consideration. Finally, production and distribution also play a crucial role in the quality of the end product, with different versions of subtitles often produced for the same film or TV series, which vary in relation to the format which is distributed and commercialised: TV live, IPTV (both Video on Demand and Stream Video on Demand), podcast (Hassell 2009), DVD, Blu-ray or from any of the crowdsourcing possibilities such as fansub. In Spain for example, cinema subtitles and DVD subtitles for the same movie are produced by different companies, which leads to different results, the same situation is for audio description with ONCE producing their own closed service and public versions produced by commercial content providers. This situation is not unique in Spain. The *Dr Who* AD broadcast for TV by BBC was versioned for the DVD release, hence two slightly different ADs are now on offer. This fact should be taken into consideration when studying AD as what is presented in the DVD is not the same as what is broadcast on television, and ultimately not the responsibility of one single person: neither the translator, the audio describer or the voice artist. It is more likely that a team of people have been working in the production chain, and so target text should not be identified with an individual. This is more poignant when the mode of translation is that of revoicing. Dubbing, voice-over and audio description written target texts go through one further process; that of being read by professional voice-talents, who also will on many occasions adapt the text, producing many surprising changes which are often recorded in academic papers holding the translator as the culprit.

## 2. The Audio Description of TV Drama Series

Many drama series are audio described, and it may be interesting to report on the work of the BBC a referent for media accessibility. At the time of writing this article, TV series *Dr Who*, *How not to live your life*, *Doctors*, *Casualty*, the soap opera *EastEnders*, sitcom series *Gavin and Stacy* and children's series such as *ChuckleVision* or *Horrible Histories* have AD in real time via broadcast, but also via broadband (IPTV) with free access through the BBC webpage iplayer. Some of those audio descriptions are stored on the iplayer webpage[4], and audio descriptions are also released in in-house produced commercial DVDs. Technical requirements will mean a slight variation in the AD, such as that already mentioned for *Dr Who*. In some cases, such as the costume drama series *Jane Eyre* (White, 2006), there was AD in all the episodes broadcast, but on only two episodes on the DVD. Lack of homogeneity in the presentation, availability and the way to tag accessible services on offer are some issues, and one of the objectives of the EU project Hbb4All (<http://www.hbb4all.eu>)[5] which has been pointed at in many publications (Matamala and Orero 2011, Remael *et al* 2014). Technology may come to the rescue here. Consuming audiovisual media through streaming has grown both in subscribers and pirates alike, for films and TV series. This is being driven by the broader trends of media consumption over the Internet, increasing broadband penetration, higher download speeds and growth in connected devices[6]. The unification of services under one platform has many advantages, such as offering multiple languages, and also

The feature which differentiates the AD of TV series from that of film or theatre is continuity. Series are a part of a whole and often ongoing work, while films are self contained and finished – even in sequels. The fact that a production team is behind the whole series, and its potential implication in accessibility, could present the first opportunity for a coherent approach to audio description, rather than the casual approach which is nowadays the norm. Looking at the different narrative units in the episode could offer possible approaches to be considered when audio describing a series.

### 3. Structure of the episode *In Excelsis Deo*

One obvious difference for the practical audio description of TV series, compared to that of films, is that series have a different structure from that of a film, and even formal aspects such as credits have a different function (Matamala and Orero 2011, Matamala 2014).

Episodes are dependent units which form a season, which in turn are part of a series, and they have a formal structure which should be understood when considering possible audio description approaches. The drama TV series is organised in the following units: series credits, re-cap, opening credits, three acts, end of episode, final credits and distributor and producing logos. In this section the visual text of each unit is analysed with some general comments regarding audio description.

#### 3.1 Series credits

The episode begins with a sequence, common to all episodes, where an opaque US flag allows for some sunrays to shine and reveal the view of the west wing of the White House, in Washington DC, US. The title at the bottom of the screen reads THE WEST WING.





### **Sequence 1. Three frames from the opening credits in sequential order**

Since this opening is common to all the episodes, it should have a standard AD formula which is repeated for each episode. During this short sequence the theme music can be heard, allowing for audio description to be read on top of the music.

#### **3.2 Re-cap**

The frames from Sequence 1 are followed by the re-cap where one can hear spoken: “Previously on the West Wing.” This leaves no time to include any extra information in the form of audio description, though as will be seen in section 4.1 other strategies such as compensation could be adopted. The re cap for this episode contains the following dialogue exchanges:





## Sequence 2. Danny walks into J.C. office carrying a goldfish bowl

The dialogue is as follows

---

C.J.                    What are you holding?

---

**Danny**             Josh said you liked goldfish

---

C.J.                    The crackers Danny. The cheese things that you have in a party

---





**Sequence 3. Sam and a high-class prostitute are sitting in a dinner**

---

Sam                    You got a thing tonight – a date?

---

Prostitute           He calls me, he tells me what to wear, the rest of it's a big surprise.

---

Sam                    I'm just saying, your night job stinks. (Fine) And I'm taking your sandwich

---





**Sequence 4. Leo and the President are standing in the President's office**

---

**Leo**                    There's going to be trouble

---

**President**           Lillienfield?

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### Sequence 5. Josh and Leo are having an exchange

Josh	You were maybe into something that wasn't acceptable
Leo	Pills
Josh	Were you in treatment.
Leo	Records kept by these facilities are confidential Josh.
Josh	He's got them

As the re-cap doesn't provide any time for an audio description. If it is decided to offer the complementary visual information through audio description, compensation will be the only available strategy. These effect of dialogues, from five different scences, will act as an audio introduction Fryer and Romero (forthcoming) to the episode, and the user will rely on this information to follow the present episode.

### 3.3 Intertitles

The re-cap, formed by flashes of four selected excerpts, has the function of providing context for the development of this episode. It is followed by the following two frames.





IN EXCELSIS DEO



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23  
7:30 A.M.

### **Sequence 6. Two intertitle credits**

There is a unanimous AD recommendation strategy: to read them aloud (Benecke & Dosch, 2004; Ofcom, 2006; Orero & Wharton, 2007; Puigdomènech, 2007; Remael, 2005; Snyder, 2006; UNE 153020, 2007, Vercauteren 2007). Then we move to a short sequence, before the actual opening credits and the start of the episode.

#### **3.4 Opening scene**

After the intertitles, music with bells can be heard as a means of presenting the festive context in which the episode takes place. It presents the main characters from *West Wing* and lays the building blocks of the two themes which will be fully developed in this episode: The two conflicting sides of the same theme: Christmas. The joy of meeting the loved ones versus the sadness from the loss of those who have died. This short interlude also has the function of creating suspense, with a police call requesting Toby for an interview.



### **Sequence 7. *WestWing* main characters in the Christmas decorated set**

The re-cap provides the context for the episode within the rest of the series, and also the specific theme for the episode [i.e. Christmas].

#### **3.5 Opening credits**

The same music and presentation style is shown as with the first credits -see sequence 1- and is common to the whole series. The opaque US flag shows the eight main characters of the series.

Each character is presented in the same style: the picture of an actor is seen through the flag, followed by a still frame in black and white with the name of the actor. The credits finish with a picture of the eight characters sitting with the president.





### Sequence 8. Opening credits for the series

This is followed by the rest of the credits rolling - five guests invited for this episode, the name of the creator, music composer, co-producer, and producer – which are shown over opening scenes; images of the Arlington Cemetery, one of the main plot locations of the episode.







Sequence 9. Opening credits for this episode

Issues such as when to read, how many to read, and how to read the credits are important considerations. There are many options: Read all, read some, or a selection of the credits. They can be read all together at the beginning (Orero 2011), or synchronised with when each character is presented. The choice will be settled as the style for the whole series. Special attention should be paid to the overall effect of mixing AD with the name of characters, to avoid cohesion problems (Braun 2007, 2008, and 2011, Taylor 2004). Audio description of credits should be decided for each product, since in some cases it is possible to read the titles synchronically, while in other cases it may produce confusion. An example will be the synchronic audio description of the first frame in Sequence 9: “Paul Austin: a man pushes a wheelchair”. This may lead to believe that Paul Austin is the man pushing the wheelchair.

### 3.6 Three acts

After the opening credits the episode begins, and as such is marked in the dialogue list:

*SMASH CUT TO: MAIN TITLES. END TEASER \* \* \* ACT ONE*

*FADE IN: EXT. KOREAN WAR MEMORIAL – DAY à Early morning, we pan through the monuments, memorials, benches, and visitors. Toby approaches a police officer standing in front of a bench, where a man, covered with blankets, lies.*

Table 1. Dialogue list for introduction of act 1

Two more acts follow with the following information

*FADE OUT. END ACT ONE \* \* \* ACT TWO*

*FADE IN: INT. HALLWAY – DAY à Sam is standing in the hallway reading some papers, when C.J. rounds the corner and approaches. They talk on the way through the hallway to their offices.*

Table 2. Dialogue list for introduction of act 2

*FADE OUT. END ACT TWO \* \* \* ACT THREE*

*FADE IN: EXT. UNDERPASS OF WASHINGTON BRIDGE - NIGHT*

*Toby approaches a large group of homeless people in a soup line ran by volunteers. Toby is very uncomfortable and unsure of himself. He tries to get their attention.*

Table 3. Dialogue list for introduction of act 3

Finally when the episode finishes we have the final information

*The episode ends with a montage of juxtaposing shots of the military funeral For Walter Hufnagle and the activity in THE MURAL ROOM. Throughout, we can hear the boys' choir sing 'Little Drummer Boy.' The hearse arrives at ARLINGTON CEMETERY, SECTION 43. Toby, Mrs. Landingham, and George get out of the car. George is holding a bouquet of flowers. The honor guard carries the casket to the grave. They begin the ritual of folding the flag that covered the casket.*

*THE MURAL ROOM. Sam and C.J. join Mandy and Bartlet. Then, Charlie and Leo join.*

*ARLINGTON CEMETERY. The honor guard starts to shoot their rifles in salute. Toby flinches with the first shot. Mrs. Landingham with the second.*

*THE MURAL ROOM. Donna and Josh join the group.*

*ARLINGTON CEMETERY. The honor guard starts to hand the tightly folded flag to Toby who gestures uncomfortably to George, who is then presented with the flag. George gently places the flowers on the casket. They all stand to leave.*

FADE OUT.  
THE END  
\* \* \*

Having a dialogue list is of great help, since considerable information regarding where the action takes place, directions for the actors, and even descriptions of emotions are available. A dialogue list can also be helpful when focusing on the most prominent events, thus helping to select the most relevant information (Orero and Vilaró 2014).

Since the episode is clearly divided in three acts, this is also reflected in the video edition and montage, hence there is time before each act to read the information on offer in the dialogue list, and perhaps add more, as if it was an audio introduction. Special attention should be paid to the amount of information added and offered, and this is a question of further research. How much detail can be retained and memorised requires urgent attention, since there is little point in filling in all the available space which may provide further information of little value, and provoke fatigue in the viewer (Orero 2011). This is a poignant issue in *West Wing*, since dialogue exchange is very dynamic and rich information relating to the plot. It contains puns and clever remarks, and therefore one AD approach could be to offer very simple and basic information to avoid unnecessarily tiring the viewer.

#### 4. Some further considerations when audio describing *In Excelsis Deo*

Looking at existing guidelines on AD, as for example Bernd Benecke's 2004 we find specific comments regarding TV series:

Translation: "Films with a lot of dialogue, especially TV series, may lead to an exception (...from the rule that you do not interfere with the dialogue). It is often impossible to give all the necessary information in the few and then mostly short gaps, in particular if you want to give some extra information about the look of the characters. In such cases we decided to select dialogues that appear to be less important and overlay them with the description. Of course this must happen always warily and with a lot of respect for the film. Technically this is only possible with TV (and DVD) programmes where you do a mixing of soundtrack and description. You can't do it with live-events[7]. (Benecke 2004)

Joel Snyder[8] also offered the following solution to the problems posed by series, and their high dependency in previous descriptions, and information.

i.e., a website that offers the "basics" and can be accessed at any time, even during a show. It would serve the same function as pre-show notes prior to a live performance: providing detailed description for which there'd be no opportunity to provide during the showing/weaving it in and around the original soundtrack. On a DVD, the enhanced description material could be keyed to certain elements ala a phrase or image that's "hyperlinked" to additional material.

Louise Fryer (2016) in her recent book comments on TV series and the challenge posed by keeping up a global coherence in a long running AVT product saying "The potential problems become heightened with other genres such as series and serials, whether for TV or for films that elapse over a longer time span or a larger number of episodes." (Fryer 2016: 113)

Still more localised problems can be found in this episode which should be taken into account before embarking on a definite audio description approach, which could be applied for the whole series. In this section we conduct a detailed study of the key questions when drafting an audio description (Vercauteren 2007).

##### 4.1 Continuity

The re cap is one of the basic features of the TV series. It offers key information regarding running themes and gives context to the overall plot. It also serves as a reminder of the characters and their relationships. The re-cap in *West Wing* offers four glimpses from the previous episode. The audiovisual text offers a fast dialogue in couples:

CJ and Danny,  
Sam with a prostitute,  
Leo and the President, and finally  
Leo with Josh.

The four dialogues make reference to the two leading stories, which will be developed further in this episode:

- 1- The possible romantic relationship between C.J. and the reporter Danny Concannon.
- 2- Congressman Peter Lillianfield's accusation of drug abuse by staff in *West Wing*. This leads Josh to think of Leo McGarry's history of drug and alcohol problems, and subsequent rehabilitation, and the certainty that it will soon be leaked and made public.

According to the policy or guidelines adopted in the production team, this audiovisual context could have two different AD strategies:

- a- Omission - With the effect that audience will be left with only one channel of information: listening to dialogues.
- b- Compensation – The explicit information regarding the two leading stories will be read later while the opening credits are rolling, since there is ample time to offer extra information.

##### 4.2 Date and time

This section is linked to what Vercauteren (2007) defines as "when". The action takes place over two days: the 23rd and 24th of December. This is clearly marked by the intertitles which, as already mentioned in section 3.3, should be read aloud.





THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23  
7:30 A.M.



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24

**Sequence 10. Intertitles indicating the day when action takes place.**

During the two days marked by the intertitles, the action is developed in linear time. We begin in the morning on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> and the action has a logical development all the way to the last scene on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> December when Toby is at the cemetery and misses the Christmas singing by the tree with his work colleagues.



### **Sequence 11. While colleagues listen to the choir Toby is at the cemetery**

The only distortion regarding time and events which poses an added challenge to the audio description is that of the re-cap, or the verbal references to previous events, these verbal flashbacks – prolepsis in narratological terms- are exclusively carried out through dialogues, hence theoretically posing no challenge. An example of a reference to the past is when Mrs Landingham narrates the story of her twin sons who died in the Korean War, reinforcing thus one of the sub-plots of the episode, and justifies her presence at Arlington cemetery in the last scene, along with Toby – see second frame in Sequence 11.

Nevertheless if there was any visual image which becomes a leitmotif in the series, or a key to further developments, it is advisable to call attention to it the first time it takes place, what has been called “anchoring” in order to be able to recall it efficiently in future episodes (Braun 2008, Vilaró & Orero 2012).

#### **4.3 Location**

This section is linked to what Vercauteren (2007, Remael & Vercauteren 2007 and 2012) defined as “where”. Action takes place and plot develops in the different rooms of the West Wing of the White House. The name of the rooms is provided by the dialogue list. Other locations are:

the flat where the prostitute lives,

a bookshop

the homeless center and the suburb of Washington where Toby goes to look for Walter Hufnagle's brother, and the Arlington Cemetery section 74.

All the locations are clearly marked in the dialogue list, making very easy to offer the correct name of place. A further consideration will be to add details regarding Arlington Cemetery, with the life-size human figures dotted along the park, in full field uniform. While this may be a common sight for the US audience, it may need to be explicitated when translated.

In some instances, such as the final scene at the cemetery in Image 1, there is the following object which should be considered for AD purposes as written information, and read aloud, as the case with intertitles in section 3.2.



**Image 1. Image indicating precise location where action takes place**

#### 4.5 Emotions

The audio description of this episode offers little challenge, given the fact we count with the invaluable information provided in the dialogue list. In some cases the information on offer beyond the transcription provides more than direct references to identifying the speaker, or where the action takes place, and it also chooses the most relevant information when a series of options are on offer. This is the case for the last scene of the episode, where three issues are shown by the visual narrative: staff gathering round the Christmas tree to sing carols, the choir singing, and the burial protocol at the cemetery. We can read the following info in the dialogue list:

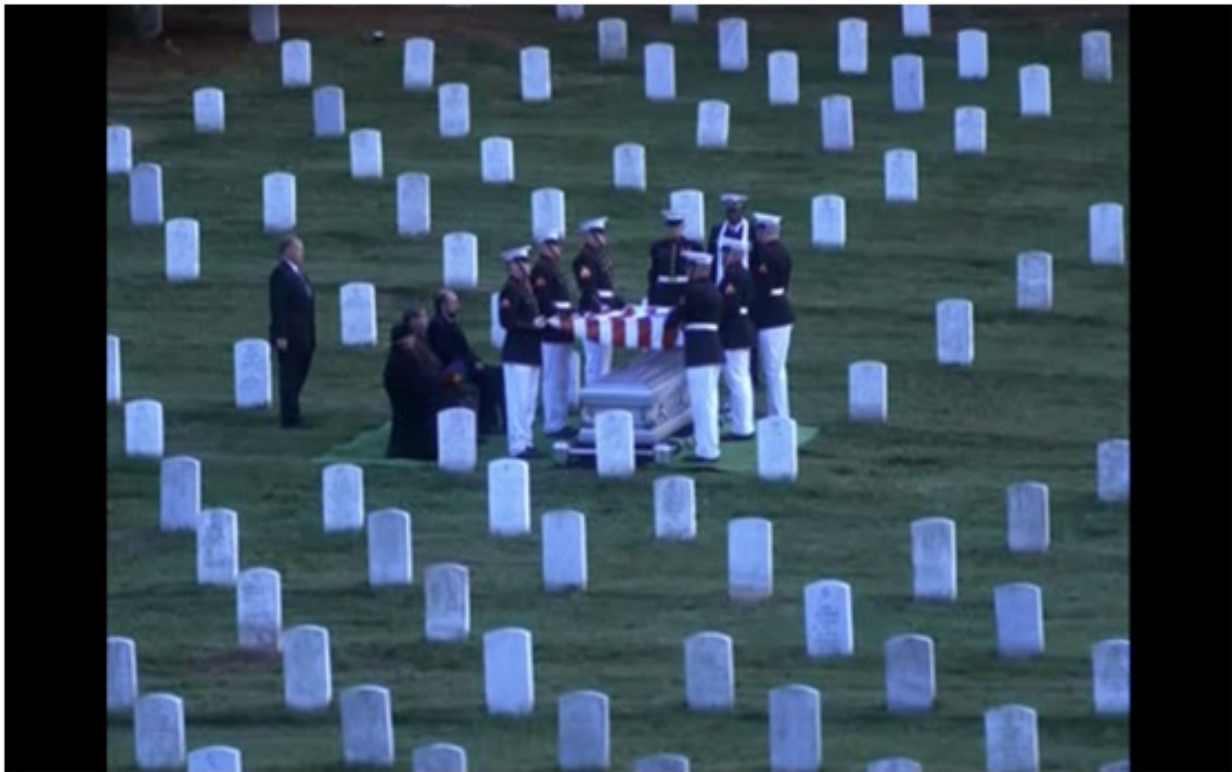
*The episode ends with a montage of juxtaposing shots of the military funeral for Walter Hufnagle and the activity in THE MURAL ROOM. Throughout, we can hear the boys' choir sing 'Little Drummer Boy.' The hearse arrives at ARLINGTON CEMETERY, SECTION 43. Toby, Mrs. Landingham, and George get out of the car. George is holding a bouquet of flowers. The honor guard carries the casket to the grave. They begin the ritual of folding the flag that covered the casket*

But beyond this information, many more issues are at stake, and many details can be additionally offered as there is no time restriction. A literal description of the military funeral protocol is on offer in the dialogue list, but the sheer number of white stone graves dotted across the green lawn could be included, describing the dazzling contrast of colours that is created. The number of white tombstones and its implication has an impact giving rise to emotions. These are provoked further by the intended contrast of the desolated scene at the burial ceremony with the audio-track of members of staff at West Wing singing merrily by the tree, the Christmas carols representing the spirit and security they feel. Antagonistic images are shown in Sequences 11 and 12 with a clear parallelism between the two rows of people standing in Sequence 11. This final sequence has been edited to create an impact on the viewer and it should be taken into consideration when drafting the audio description. While audio description tends to stay at a literal level, that is describing what meets the eye, in this case the symbolic function should be described (Orero 2012, Davila and Orero 2014).

The dignity shown by Walter Hufnagle's brother, George, during the ceremony is also startling. He has been previously described in the dialogues as "...a little slow. I mean, he's all right and everything. He's just a little slow" and is homeless "dozens of homeless people are huddled around fires trying to keep warm. He approaches an older man, GEORGE HUFNAGLE. Like others, George is sitting by a fire". Given this background George's behaviour through the ceremony is impeccable, and perhaps this should be commented in the audio description (Mazur 2014).







### Sequence 12. Burial protocol at Arlington cemetery

While reading visual narrative is acceptable in audio description beyond mere description, we can for this series rely in the information regarding emotions and facial gestures offered in the dialogue list.

#### 4.6 Characters

Continuity is one of the major defining features of the genre. It has a direct impact on the audio description and character building within the narrative. And as argued by Monaco (1977: 541):

Television has an advantage in building character over every other narrative medium, except for the novel saga. This is also why television is not so much a medium of stories as of moods and atmosphere. We tune in not to find out what is happening ( for generally the same thing is always happening), but to spend time with the characters.

Characters are responsible for the development of the plot, hence special attention should be paid to the description of their depth and trait changes from episode to episode. As already mentioned previously, this series relies heavily on its dialogue, which offers a vast array of information beyond the plot. We learn for example of Leo's personality and generosity from the exchange between Josh and Donna:

*If one of us was in trouble, he [Leo] would be the first person to-*  
And later between Josh and Sam

*We owe Leo everything. I mean everything.*

Beyond dialogue, as previously mentioned, we can also conduct some visual narrative reading of images which reveal character traits. The audio description can be developed further by adding extra information. For example, Toby offers insights into his personality as we see more than the extra comments underlined in the dialogue list:

*The honor guard starts to shoot their rifles in salute. Toby flinches with the first shot. Mrs. Landingham with the second.*

*ARLINGTON CEMETERY. The honor guard starts to hand the tightly folded flag to Toby who gestures uncomfortably to George, who is then presented with the flag. George gently places the flowers on the casket. They all stand to leave.*

But at the risk of being accused of interpreting, we could also read the following four frames where in the first, Toby helps George Hufnagle's brother to get out of the car, showing care and compassion. In the second Toby takes a tear from his cheek. The third frame shows Toby's concern for George Hufnagle, since he is going to be presented with the flag and may not know what to do, and Toby doesn't know how he will react. The last frame is a still of a series where Toby looks at what the other two men are doing, and raises his hand to his heart, but this action is performed with insecurity and indecision.







**Frames 1, 2, 3 & 4 where we can see extra character traits for Toby.**

As already mentioned in the previous section, we could also offer character traits for George Hufnagle beyond the fact he is homeless man and has some learning difficulties, which is all we learn from the dialogues. Audio describing characters is one of the thorniest and most interesting issues in audio description (Ballester 2006, Fresno 2012, Orero 2011, Vercauteren and Orero 2013, Benecke 2014) and though at this stage we have raised some possible strategies for audio description, much is still to be learnt regarding memory, number of adjectives and order, and saturation of information, to mention a few topics.

#### **4.7 Sound**

Most definitions of audio description remain at the level of rendering missing visual information. Given the fact that the audiovisual text is multimodal and multisemiotic

there is a coherence between the visual and the auditory channels. Some articles have been published on this issue (Igareda 2012, Remael 2012, Szarkowska and Orero 2014) and clearly there is an instance in this episode that clearly illustrates the need for an audio description of some sounds, it also raises the issue of the need to preserve silence as an important symbolic element (Orero, Maszerowska and Casacuberta 2016).

In the final scene at the Arlington cemetery, the guards, as part of the protocol, fire three times (see second frame in Sequence 12). This action is superimposed on the carol being sung by the choir. Moreover both Toby and Mrs

Landingham are shaken by the noise, as can be read in the dialogue list

*ARLINGTON CEMETERY. The honor guard starts to shoot their rifles in salute. Toby flinches with the first shot.*

*Mrs. Landingham with the second*

And also seen in the following frames



#### **Frames 5 & 6. Toby and Mrs Landingham are shaken by the shooting**

Hence it is important to describe the sound before it can be heard in order to offer a context and an explanation. The shooting breaks the existing running sound, which is the peaceful and harmonic carol, with the resulting effect acting as a shattering contrast.

#### **4. 8 Audio describing absence of information**

As already mentioned in Section 3.3 there is general agreement regarding written information which appears on the screen: it should be read. This should be performed when we face the intertitles, titles, and even to point to the exact location where an action takes place, as shown previously in Frame 3. But in this episode there is a sequence which creates a problem, and that is the moment when Josh gives Donna his Christmas present: a book. She opens the book and reads the dedication written by Josh. The sequence in the dialogue list is as follows:

DANNY Okay. [Danny walks away as the camera moves to Donna, who is sitting at her desk opening her Christmas gift from Josh. He watches on as she reveals a book.]

DONNA "Heimlich Beckengruber on The Art and Artistry of Alpine Skiing."

JOSH It's got a molted calf cover and original drab boards.

DONNA I don't know what to say.

JOSH I wrote a note inside. [Donna opens the book and begins to read what Josh has written. She is obviously affected by his words.]

JOSH Donna, don't get emotional. Donna, don't get... You know, let's try and maintain some sort of... [He's looking around the bullpen embarrassed. Oblivious to his concerns of propriety, Donna closes the book, stands up, and approaches Josh.]

DONNA [tearfully] You see!? You spend most of our time being, you know, you. And then you write something like this to me. Thank you. [She pulls him into a tight hug. Josh, forgetting impropriety, hugs her back.]

JOSH I meant it.

DONNA Skis would have killed you?

JOSH [pulls back] Yeah.

While Josh himself in his dialogue offers an accurate audio description of the book he has given to Donna as an object: "It's got a molted calf cover and original drab boards," he doesn't reveal the content of the dedication. She opens the book and reads, but the screen does not shown what is written, see Frame 7.



**Frame 7. Donna opens the book and reads a dedication, no close up is offered**

The fact that a few seconds go by and there is no dedication to be read aloud, in this case – and exceptionally – the audio description should read the absence. That is “Donna opens the book and reads the dedication, though this is not offered on the screen” or something similar of this type. This is because there is a filmic convention (Perego 2014) of offering a close up of whatever is written. In this case the director has played with this, breaking the convention for the creating the effect of suspense. Donna seems shaken by the written words, but we have no access to them and neither do the visual impaired audience. Tension is released when she finally reads the dedication “Skis would have killed you”. This example returns to the reflection on the function of audio description and the many modalities of communication in the audiovisual text, and also its narratological structure and its symbolism (Fryer 2010, Kruger 2010).

## 5. Final remarks

The episode finishes with the final credits rolling, which offer the titles over the black screen. Again, how many credits should be read aloud, and how much information regarding the logos are decisions to be made by the broadcaster who will have signed the AD contract for its accessibility. How much time and detail is offered for the logos is also a matter of company policy. For example in frame 10 the Warner Bros logo should perhaps have the same AD as that on DVDs and cinemas, since it is the same logo. But as already mentioned at the beginning of this article, media accessibility can be defined best by its lack of homogenous treatment.

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JOHN WELLS



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### Frames 8, 9 & 10. Final credits

#### 6. Translating audio description

This article has been written not taking into consideration the possibility of translating the audio description (Jankowska 2015). This interesting process (Orero 2007) is epigonic to the actual process of translation of the source text, be it by subtitling, dubbing or voice-over. For each case a different type of audio description will be adequate. In the first case audio subtitling, or audio subtitling with audio description (Braun & Orero 2010) will be the candidate. When the series is dubbed, audio description, as that described in this article, will be suitable. Special consideration should be paid to translating issues, such as localization and the different approaches to deal with reality (Matamala & Rami 2009, Maszerowska and Mangiron 2014). Finally when dealing with voice-over, Szarkowska (2011) proposes using speech technologies which is a very interesting possibility with added financial attractiveness and should not be dismissed. Audio description can be studied from many perspectives, all complementary, and studies dealing with audio description technologies related to film or TV genre should also be a part of the immediate research agenda.

Dialogue list availability offers the possibility of translating both the dialogues and the extra information added in brackets, which could be used as an audio description. A table has been created, where all the added information from the dialogue list, has been classified. The purpose of this classification is to have at a glance the type of information which is on offer. The resulting table offers the possibility of a comparative study on the nature of audio descriptions, and also to ascertain the AD textual type. It will be interesting to compare the different ADs created with or without dialogue list information, and its translations.

Looking at the list of dialogues there is a column of actions with the most entries, against emotions with the least. This perhaps reinforces Monaco's (1977) comment regarding television as a medium where emotions are not fully developed:

Television is not only better equipped than most other media to deal with subtle development of character; it is also conversely poor equipped to succeed with other basic dramatic elements. Because it is much less intense than cinema (it gives us less visual and aural information), action and spectacle come off more poorly than in the movie or theatre. And because it is certainly less intimate than live theatre, It can't deal as well with the high drama of ideas and emotions. (Monaco 1977: 542)

#### 7. Conclusion

The article has presented the many common, formal features present in a drama TV series: the textual typology, narratological units, the organization and presentation of information, and also the different modes. A descriptive analysis of all the information available has paved the way for proposing different AD strategies which could be taken into consideration when embarking in the audio description for a series.

The article has not looked into the issue of the voice reading the audio description. This is poignant and not much information is offered by any academic publication. When dealing with the audio describer the role seems to stop when the script is created. Guidelines regarding voices used --sex, age, and variety -- are hard to come by. For TV series there are two possibilities, to extend the Ofcom (2015) recommendation for audiodescription of series to the delivery since using the same person, as recommended

"Ideally, the same people should be used to describe a series of programmes, both to ensure a consistent style (e.g. in terms of level of detail) and because the description forms a part of the programme for users" (Ofcom, 2015: PointA.34). In this case the same voice being used for a long period of time has the risk of becoming one more character. It also has the dubbing effect risk. When the voice used for describing a soap opera is used for another AVT

product there is a instant transportation of one programme to the other, as is the case with *East Enders* (2015) and *The Great British Bakeoff* (2015). Watching the latter with audio description had the instant association to *East Enders* as if the audio describer was a character from “the square” which had moved to “the tent”. The use of different voices may break with the association of a voice to a programme. Perhaps the same effect of dubbing countries may take place and audience gets use to the same voices as in Spain for example where Marlon Brando has the same voice as Cary Grant, Richard Harris and Tony Curtis.

Looking at the special issues, which are at present under research from different perspectives – characterisation, emotion, time, continuity, etc. – the article has finished with some reflection on the possible ways of tackling audio description, taking into account the source text and the many translation possibilities. The material presented shows the field of audio description, some of the many research avenues, and the urge to engage other academic fields in this research since there is much work to be taken on board before we can draw some meaningful conclusions and really useful guidelines.

## Notes

[1] [https://aplicacionesua.cpd.ua.es/tra\\_int/usu/buscar.asp](https://aplicacionesua.cpd.ua.es/tra_int/usu/buscar.asp) [consulted 25 July 2010]

[2] This research is supported by the grant from the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation FFI2012-39056, the Catalan Government funds 2014SGR027, and also the EU Projects HBB4ALL # 621014 ([www.hbb4all.eu](http://www.hbb4all.eu)) and ACT # 2015-1-ES01-KA203-015734 ([www.actproject.eu](http://www.actproject.eu)).

[3] <http://canales.diariovasco.com/ocio/television/perdidos-lost/perdidos-ultimo-capitulo-final-201005241118.php>

and [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/gente/Agri dulce/final/Perdidos/elpepugen/20100524elpepuage\\_2/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/gente/Agri dulce/final/Perdidos/elpepugen/20100524elpepuage_2/Tes) and

[http://www.elpais.com/articulo/Pantallas/Perdidos/resaca/despues/telon/elpepugen/20100525elpepirtv\\_3/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/Pantallas/Perdidos/resaca/despues/telon/elpepugen/20100525elpepirtv_3/Tes) [consulted 20 May 2015]

[4] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/categories/audiodescribed> [consulted 20 May 2015]

[5] The same could be said about subtitles, and more poignantly for *West Wing* since they only have subtitles in the first 5 series, from series 6 only French and Spanish subtitles are on offer. No SDH subtitles were on offer in any of the series.

[6] <http://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2013/03/07/how-big-can-netflixs-u-s-streaming-business-get/> consulted 20 May 2015]

[7] "Sehr dialogreiche Filme, vor allem aber Fernsehserien führen dagegen zu einer Einschränkung. Es ist dort oft unmöglich, die notwendigen Informationen auf die wenigen und dann meist kurzen Dialogpausen zu beschränken, insbesondere, wenn auch noch ausführlichere Beschreibungen der Personen eingefügt werden sollen. In solchen Fällen haben wir entschieden, nicht unbedingt notwendige Dialogstellen auszuwählen und sie mit der Beschreibung zu übersprechen. Natürlich muss dies immer behutsam und mit viel Respekt vor dem Film geschehen. Technisch ist dies auch nur bei Fernsehausstrahlungen kein Problem, da ja eine völlig neue Mischung von Filmtönen plus Audio-Description gemacht wird. Bei Live-Vorführungen ist ein Übersprechen nicht möglich! [Benecke's translation.]

[8] In a private communication July 2010.

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"Audio Describing the TV series *The West Wing*", inTRAlinea Special Issue: A Text of Many Colours – translating *The West Wing*.

Permanent URL: <http://www.intraline.org/archive/article/2193>